

The Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600



15th July, 2009

To whom this may concern,

This letter refers to the proposed changes to the current Youth Allowance benefit that will affect many young Australians and their families now and in the future.

There has been both opposition and support in this rural area of the South East of South Australia with local news reports in print and media outlining the changes that may take place. In support from Labor representatives they praise the many 'benefits' that Youth Allowance recipients will have, such as more scholarships, raising the income for eligibility for low income earners etc.

My concern and the concern of many others, is the qualifying criteria that student leavers may now have to face. None of these benefits will be available if the youth do not qualify. This is not a point that any in favour of such changes either see or point out in print or media so therefore appear to regard as not important.

For the current government to expect young, inexperienced, unskilled people to immediately (yes immediately—they have only 6 months spare for the weeks of employment that is under the required criteria) find 30 hours per week continuous employment is astonishing. These school leavers will be competing against experienced men and women in rural areas, who also need jobs and are facing reduced working hours through cut backs and forced retention.

A report from the ABC News website,

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/07/10/2621894.htm>,

states that, "Australia's jobless rate has reached a six-year high of 5.8 per cent in June, while full-time jobs fell by almost 22,000. Posted Fri Jul 10, 2009 6:32am AEST, updated Fri Jul 10, 2009 7:26am AEST". Accessed on the 12th July 2009.

This comment is supported by the Australian Bureau of Statistics from 9/7/09 which also states the unemployment rate has increased to 5.8% for the month of June 2009.

<http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/6202.0Main+Features1Jun%202009?OpenDocument> accessed on 12th July 2009.

The reality of country youth finding employment in this situation is far different from their city dwelling peers. Our eldest, in 2004, worked three different jobs, travelling many kilometers, as country youth often have to do, in order to achieve the required earnings to qualify for Youth Allowance. Both our children have never taken this benefit for granted and we continued to support them financially.

The proposed changes will alter the dynamics, the goal setting and ambitions that current students will face in planning their future. Individuals will be discouraged by an unnecessary lengthy delay to university studies, assuming that their university will hold their placement over for that amount of time.

A twelve month wait for school leavers is an achievable amount of time where the school leaver remains focused and happily plans for their future which is within their reach. To increase this to two years causes a stressful rethink of plans and goals with ambitions put on hold or ceased altogether. These youth will not be represented at university level if this is allowed to happen.

The alternative of parents fully funding one or more of their children to relocate to the city is a pressure that most families would find extremely difficult. Also to assume that a university student can continue working 30 hours per week and undertake a full or part time study load beggars belief.

My thoughts and opinions that I have passed on here are an honest and practical account of our own family's experiences with the trials of supporting our two children to achieve their goals by furthering their education at university level. I sincerely trust that common sense will prevail and Australia will see a win-win outcome for everyone.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stephanie Barton".

Mrs Stephanie Barton